Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution

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Introduction

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Shi'ism exists as a faith within the faith of Islam, as a set of beliefs held by perhaps one in ten Muslims today. Only Iran is overwhelmingly Shi'i in population; in two or three other countries, Shi'is constitute bare majorities, and in the rest of the Muslim world they live as minorities or are not found at all. But this simple accounting belies the profound influence of Shi'ism upon contemporary Islam and perceptions of Islam. For there are Shi'is intent upon altering the intellectual and political course not only of Shi'ism, but of all Islam. They are set apart from other Muslims not only by their Shi'ism, but by a stridency that has infused their call for radical change with power. They made a revolution without modern precedent in Iran. They warred successfully against a collection of great and local powers in Lebanon. And some are now bent upon making yet another revolution, which will shatter Muslim complacency and discomfit Islam's enemies everywhere.

Can one explain this outpouring of energy through direct allusion to the past? The usual way to describe Shi'ism's essence is to say that its adherents have always championed the claim of Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, and his male descendants, to lead the Muslim community. After the Prophet's death, Muslims who favored other candidates repeatedly blocked the accession of Ali to the caliphate. When he finally did come to rule, they withheld their allegiance. Later they crushed a nascent movement led by Ali's son, Husayn, whom they massacred with his family and followers on a desolate plain in Iraq in the year 680. This event, commemorated annually by Shi'is through the observance of a period of mourning, provided Shi'ism with a deeply emotive drama of martyrdom. A line of Ali's descendants—the Imams—were persecuted and allegedly martyred in their turn for representing

a living challenge to illegitimate and tyrannical rule. It is this sense of suffered injustice that came to pervade Shi'ism. The fate of the martyrs was all the more poignant for the tragic truth that they had been slain by fellow Muslims. To mourn them was also to grieve for the lost unity of Islam.

What began as a dissident position on the matter of succession in the seventh century blossomed in time into a full religious tradition, distinguished from Sunni Islam by its own reading of theology and sacred history. Contemporary Shi'ism, in its several varieties, is the product of nearly 1400 years of mutation and adaptation and bears residues left by innumerable advances and retreats across the face of Islam. Shi'ism frequently provided spiritual succor to opponents of the reigning order in Islam, who were often driven to remote places. There were brief periods—as in the tenth century—when parts of the Muslim heartlands were under Shi'i rule. But in most times and in most places, Shi'is constituted minorities, occasionally persecuted and at best tolerated by a Sunni Muslim ruling establishment.

To resolve their dilemma as a minority, Shi'is employed a wide range of strategies in different times and places. These are considered in their broad outlines by Bernard Lewis in his introductory essay to this volume. When they could, Shi'is often rebelled; Islamic history is strewn with Shi'i uprisings. Most of these failed dismally, and the few Shi'i movements which succeeded in seizing power soon lost their sense of higher purpose. Shi'i empires were short-lived and limited in geographic scope. For most of the first millenium of Islam, Shi'ism was the faith not of rebels and rulers, but of cautious minorities seeking ways to reconcile religious ideals with practical realities. This was certainly the case for that form of Shi'ism which developed into what is known as Imami or Twelver Shi'ism. The strategies of accommodation developed by these Shi'is were far-reaching, and even included the deliberate concealment of their true beliefs. In a striking analogy, Lewis points out that a mild form of Shi'ism seems to have affected the intellectual life of medieval Islam, much as liberal and leftist ideas have influenced intellectuals in the modern West. In this climate of thought, the accommodationist interpretation flourished. The eradication of injustice was deferred to a point in eschatological time when the Twelfth Imam, having disappeared into occultation, would return to do final justice.

Contemporary Shi'ism shows the marks of these centuries of persecution, and the dual legacies of resistance and compromise. Shi'is were the doubters in the manifestly successful enterprise of Islam. Through the centuries, in times of turmoil and intolerance in Sunni Islam, Shi'is might be intimidated, besieged, even killed for their beliefs. In parts of the Muslim world, Shi'i traditions recall actual persecution—

not vicarious suffering for Husayn, but subsequent tragedies wrought by Sunni tormentors. These recollections are part of the inherited content of contemporary Shi'ism.

But the modern configuration of Shi'ism owes far more to a sixteenth-century development: the determination of the Safavid dynasty to impose Twelver Shi'ism as the religion of state in predominantly Sunni Iran. Emerging from Azerbaijan with a syncretic combination of Sufism and Shi'ism, the Safavids in power enticed Shi'i men of religion from their redoubts in Syria and Iraq to fashion a state orthodoxy for the new dynasty. The transformation of Iran into the bastion of Twelver Shi'i Islam was accomplished by persuasion and coercion and, despite a Sunni challenge in the eighteenth century, Iran has remained firmly Shi'i ever since.

The establishment of Twelver Shi'ism as the religion of a great Muslim empire opened an effervescent era of Shi'i political philosophy, which changed perceptions of Shi'ism's inherited themes of persecution and suffering. In Iran, Shi'ism became the religion of court and people, elucidated by *ulama* who enjoyed lavish state patronage. Could legitimate authority thus arise *before* an eschatological resolution of the contest between justice and injustice? In answering this question, Shi'i *ulama* formulated an approach to the state which sanctioned temporal rule, provided it showed due deference to the laws of Islam and the religious authority of the *ulama*. The Safavids bore the banner of Shi'i Islam for two centuries, with the general endorsement of the *ulama*. The Safavid struggle against the Sunni Ottoman Empire, as bitter as any contest between Islam and Christendom, further sanctified Safavid rule. The once prevalent notion that Shi'ism stands opposed to all temporal rule has been shown by recent scholarship to rest on far too selective a reading of Shi'i sources. The essentials of Shi'ism have been interpreted in widely differing senses by Shi'is themselves, sometimes to challenge the state, at other times to exalt it.

Another enduring effect of Safavid rule was to give Twelver Shi'ism a distinctly Iranian stamp. As Lewis points out, earlier Shi'ism showed some of the influence of pre-Islamic Iran, but so did virtually every aspect of Islamic civilization. With the Safavids, however, the world of Twelver Shi'ism realigned around their capital, Isfahan, where they supported great centers of Shi'i learning. It was here that the Shi'i religious sciences flourished, and a Shi'i clerical hierocracy gained unprecedented wealth and influence. Twelver Shi'ism came to be defined in large measure by its Iranian adherents, who today constitute about half of all Shi'is. To the east and west of Iran there remained important Shi'i populations, but these became, in a cultural sense, diaspora communities, usually deferring to Iranian Shi'ism in broad fields of theology,

philosophy, and political thought. This religious hegemony of Iran gave Twelver Shi'ism a sense of center which has ever eluded far-flung Sunni Islam. It also may have restricted the faith's expansion to a region in close proximity to Iran: It is a fairly narrow belt of Twelver Shi'ism which passes through southwest Asia.

This geographic bias of Twelver Shi'ism also preserved the faith from the scrutiny of the West. Etan Kohlberg considers the history of Western scholarship's grasp of Shi'ism, which could not compare with its appreciation of Sunni Islam. While many of Sunni Islam's great centers were Mediterranean and conducted a dialogue in warfare, trade and ideas with the West, Shi'i Islam had become predominantly Asiatic, and the lack of sustained contact with the West left Shi'ism much misunderstood. One widespread misattribution held Shi'ism to be an expression of Iranian national identity, a notion then projected upon early Shi'ism. The distortion arose from the decisive centrality of Iran in Shi'ism from the sixteenth century.

Another lasting effect of Safavid rule was the emergence of a powerful body of Shi'i *ulama*. They served and were served by the ruling dynasty, which encouraged the development of what has been described as a clerical estate. So pervasive was the influence of the *ulama* that it survived the fall of the Safavids and the turbulent eighteenth century: In a period of disruptive conquests, the *ulama* represented stability and continuity. The moral force of the religious scholars found doctrinal expression in the eighteenth-century triumph of a school within Twelver Shi'ism which conferred exceptional powers of religious interpretation upon Shi'i expounders of the law (*mujtahid*s) that were wider than any enjoyed by Sunni *ulama*. It became obligatory for each Shi'i to follow the rulings of a living *mujtahid*, and these rulings were not at all limited to the narrow realm of ritual and doctrine. During the Qajar period, from the end of the eighteenth century to the early twentieth, some Shi'i *mujtahid*s immersed themselves in politics to compensate for Qajar impotence in thwarting Western encroachment. The independence of the Shi'i *ulama* was further enhanced by the rise of Najaf in Ottoman Iraq as the foremost center of Shi'i scholarship. In Najaf, the greatest Iranian scholars were beyond Qajar reach and could appeal to their followers in Iran to adopt political positions without being subjected to countervailing pressure by the state. As foreigners staked ever larger claims to Iran's resources and territory, certain *ulama* gave their support to movements of resistance, such as the Tobacco Protest of 1891–92 and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–11. But the Shi'i *mujtahid*s advanced no claim of their own to temporal rule. Their aim was to oversee from afar, assuring that those who did rule did not overstep the guidelines of Islam.

The dislocating impact of the West in the ninteenth century also produced a pan-Islamic sentiment, which sought to minimize the differences that separated Shi'is from Sunnis. This ecumenical trend had a particularly profound effect upon Shi'i lay activists and intellectuals, who saw in it the promise of relief from the stigma attached to Shi'ism in Sunni eyes. As belief in many of the particularist aspects of Shi'ism was eroded by a growing doubt in the efficacy of all religion, doctrinal differences between Muslims seemed to pale before the threat of the West. While the Shi'i *ulama* continued to see their mission as the preservation of Islam in its Shi'i form, they adopted an ecumenical tone which is today pervasive in their formal exposition of Islam. For most Shi'is, it is no longer considered politic to dwell on the differences between Shi'i and Sunni Islam. Indeed, to cite these differences is regarded by many Shi'is as an attempt to isolate them and even as part of an imperialist plot to foment division in Islam. The doctrinal lines dividing Shi'i and Sunni, which were much sharpened during the Safavid period, have certainly been blurred over the last century. Yet in every instance in modern history when Shi'is have been summoned to action in the name of Islam, the religious symbols which have moved them have been specifically Shi'i. Ecumenism remains an intellectual exercise, with almost no place in the intimate dialogue between Shi'i *ulama* and Shi'i believers.

Accelerated modernization in Muslim lands also had a profound effect upon the standing of Shi'i communities outside Iran, in predominantly Sunni lands. Whatever the depth of the doctrinal cleavage between Shi'is and Sunnis, they had lived at more or less the same material level. But modernization had an uneven geographic impact, which sometimes created wide social and economic gaps between Shi'is and Sunnis. Those remote areas which had sheltered the Shi'is from persecution—secluded Jabal Amil in Lebanon, the marshy south of Iraq, the highlands of central Afghanistan—were little affected by the winds of modernizing change. Such change, despite its dislocations, still raised the material level of life in the cities with their predominantly Sunni populations. Shi'is in turn began to leave their redoubts in pursuit of material betterment and flowed into urban centers in ever greater numbers. Poor Shi'i neighborhoods grew up around cities such as Beirut, Baghdad, and Kabul. There it became painfully obvious to Shi'is that the religious stigma they had long borne had been transformed into the most glaring social and economic disadvantages. A sense of deprivation among these Shi'is provided much fertile ground for ideologies of political dissent—first of the Left, and later of radical Islam.

In Iran, the experiment of rapid modernization was carried to its furthest extreme by the Pahlavis. These shahs, with their vaunting

ambition to transform Iran into the region's leading military and industrial power, became modernizing authoritarians, jealous of the influence of the Shi'i *ulama*. Earlier rulers of Iran had often resented the grip of the *ulama* upon Iran's Shi'i believers, but the last of the Pahlavis, Mohammad Reza Shah, believed that he possessed sufficient charisma and power to win the people away from their clerics. Official measures gradually eroded the foundations of the wealth and independence of Iran's *ulama*. The Pahlavi assault on tradition provoked a reaction which found spokesmen among some Shi'i *ulama*, foremost among them Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

It was not the notion of an Islamic state that Khomeini introduced into Muslim controversy. There were already a number of states that regarded themselves as Islamic by law, and some were even known as Islamic republics, as Iran came to be known after the Revolution. There was nothing new in the argument for implementation of Islamic law, a demand made independently by Sunni fundamentalists throughout the Muslim world, and by Shi'i *ulama* before Khomeini. In rejecting great power domination and foreign influence, Khomeini repeated a theme common to Muslim political protest everywhere.

Rather, it was the concept of *velayat-e faqih*—the governance of the Muslim jurisprudent—that represented Khomeini's revolutionary contribution to Islamic political thought. This doctrine was to Islamic revolution what the dictatorship of the proletariat was to the Bolshevik: It declared one class, hitherto excluded from power, to be the sole source of all legitimate political authority. In every context, the championing of this doctrine was tantamount to a call for revolution. For until Khomeini's triumph, no Muslim regime, whatever its commitment to the implementation of Islamic law, was actually in the hands of Muslim jurisprudents. Khomeini determined that this law—the foundation of any Islamic state—could only be implemented by a clerical regime.

Much has been written about Khomeini's slim treatise on Islamic government, in which he expounded this idea. Far less is known about Khomeini himself and the combination of circumstances that molded his thought. It is clear, however, that his ideas underwent an unusual evolution from youthful moderation to mature extremism. In a work compiled over forty years ago, Khomeini did not demand that clerics should rule, only that their advice should guide temporal rulers. His early political statements were not calls for revolution, but admonitions—even pleas—for the ruler to change his ways. When Khomeini finally took up the banner of active opposition to the Pahlavi regime, it was ostensibly in response to what he decried as Iran's subservience to the United States. But Khomeini saw the selling of Iran to foreigners as a

symptom of the greater ill of rule by those ignorant of Islam. His grievance was that the regime would not heed *ulama* such as himself on a host of political, social, and economic questions. Only after it became clear that his own advice and warnings had no effect at all, did Khomeini propose that the *ulama* should withhold their allegiance. This culminated in a crisis, which ended in his expulsion from Iran in 1964.

It was in Iraqi exile that Khomeini concluded that monarchy as an institution was utterly incompatible with Islam and that all temporal authority devolved upon the *ulama*. In Khomeini's reading of Shi'i theology, the *ulama* were the sole legitimate heirs of the Imams, empowered to act in their absence. The extent to which this view represented a break with Shi'i tradition has preoccupied many scholars of Shi'ism, who have noted that in earlier periods, the Shi'i *ulama* generally assumed a subordinate role, deferring to temporal rulers. This self-effacement is still preferred by some of Shi'ism's most learned *mujtahids*, who part company with Khomeini over his interpretation of *velayat-e faqih*. But Khomeini's interpretation was not woven of whole cloth. Since the eighteenth century, the *ulama* had accumulated a kind of authority more resilient than that of any ruling dynasty. This social authority had progressively found expression in religious doctrine as elaborated by the Shi'i *ulama* themselves. From this sense of self-importance among some of Iran's *ulama*, Khomeini built a network of support in the mosques, and this network would eventually rule the streets and finally seize the palaces.

The extensive literature already generated by the Islamic Revolution has established how Khomeini harnessed the most evocative themes of Shi'i Islam to his movement. His politicization of the annual Ashura rites, which mark the tragedy of Karbala, was a prime example of this utilitarian reinterpretation of basic symbols. In the traditional Ashura observances, the mourning for the martyred Husayn is intended to win his intercession. The participants lament in sorrow; self-flagellation, as a sign of mourning, is customary. The traditional Ashura is a demonstration of pity for the martyred Husayn and a bid for personal redemption through his suffering.

But in recent decades, Ashura has been politicized, and its leading characters—the martyred Husayn and his tyrannical opponent Yazid—have been recast as antagonists in an ongoing struggle between liberation and oppression. Every age brings forth a new Yazid, and resistance to tyranny is incumbent upon every believer. Husayn is no longer to be pitied; he is a hero to be emulated for his willingness to battle against all odds and offer his life as a martyr for the just cause. It was on the occasion of Ashura in 1978 that the mobilization of the masses against

the Pahlavi regime reached unprecedented proportions. That year, Khomeini went so far as to call for a suspension of the traditional processions, flagellations, and passion plays, in favor of demonstrations. Revolutionary fervor drew strength from the reenacted legend of Karbala.

The paradigm of Karbala is still widely employed in Iran's attempts to influence Shi'is in other countries where the banner of revolution has yet to be raised. And in doing battle with Iraq, the Islamic Republic's soldiers continue to draw inspiration from Karbala's resonant message. Iraq's leader is but another Yazid, and death in battle against his forces is a martyrdom worthy of comparison with Husayn's sacrifice. Khomeini's emphasis upon the Shi'i belief that Husayn went knowingly to his death at Karbala even sanctions a form of martyrdom which can only be regarded as intentional. Marvin Zonis and Daniel Brumberg have traced these themes in the speeches delivered by Khomeini since the Revolution's triumph, a source which has not received the attention given to Khomeini's own writings. While the writings were the product of exile, the speeches are the word of Khomeini in power, and that sense of power has sharpened the confrontationist edge in Khomeini's presentation of Shi'i themes. Khomeini's treatise on Islamic government seems staid in comparison.

Yet while the paradigm of Husayn at Karbala inspired a revolution and now serves Iran's defensive and expansionist policies, there is little in it to guide those who seek a blueprint in history for the just Islamic order which the Revolution promised. For Husayn's revolution was crushed, and its chief protagonist perished. Khomeini's revolution succeeded, and his followers are now cabinet ministers and Majles members. Having made an Islamic revolution, they now seek to fashion an Islamic republic, for which no precedents exist. How can the Prophet Muhammad's vision of social justice, as conceived in seventh-century Arabia, provide a guide to the formulation of policy for as complex an economy as modern Iran's?

Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani was concerned with economic and social justice. Second only to Khomeini in his influence upon the revolutionary coalition, Taleqani devoted his talents to elucidating the principles of ownership in Islam. Mangol Bayat assesses Taleqani's thought and theories, which advanced the view that the concentration of wealth in private hands is incompatible with Islam. This verdict was as revolutionary as Khomeini's determination that monarchy could not be reconciled with Islam, and Taleqani's preaching and writing brought into the Islamic movement many young persons who had been influenced by Marxist thought. They were used, then discarded, by Khomeini and his supporters. Bayat's is a study of how the revolutionary coalition dissolved after success as the call for unity became a demand for

conformity. Rather than confront Khomeini, Taleqani compromised, lest any debate be exploited by lurking enemies of the Revolution. With Taleqani's death in late 1979, the social reformers were deprived of their vacillating clerical champion, and one more obstacle disappeared from Iran's road to religiously sanctioned absolutism.

Still, the call for social justice, and particularly for the redistribution of wealth, did not die. It had placed too high among the enthusiasms of the Revolution to be completely shunted aside by the struggle against the superpowers, atheism, and Zionism. Shaul Bakhash considers Iran's quest for social justice through a maze of economic legislation, conceived by authors who claimed not to be authors at all. In their view, they sought only to implement the divine principles of moral economy set down by the Prophet. Yet it soon became clear that even the experts in Islamic jurisprudence could not agree on a single interpretation of the Prophet's administration of distributive justice. The result in Iran has been confusion, and a more frequent resort to plain pragmatism for which, naturally, the makers of policy have also unearthed a body of Islamic precedent.

Indeed, while the Islamic Republic aspires to repeat the seventh century, it has often tended to repeat the nineteenth. This is suggested by Michael M.J. Fischer, who examines the consolidation phase of the Revolution for basic structural changes in society. The persecution of the Bahais and the infliction of public punishments both recall nineteenth-century Iran, as do the terms of debate over reform of government and society. As for the principal institutions of the Islamic Republic, these recall not the Prophet's Arabia but the Pahlavi state. New faces have been installed at all levels of government, but the institutions themselves have been absorbed by the Islamic Republic. The new order seems to be an amalgam of institutions and policies, most of which are familiar enough to the people of Iran. Khomeini's charisma and millenarian ideology produced a revolution, but even he has admitted that the thorough transformation of society may take generations.

In what sense is the Islamic Republic, as distinct from the Islamic Revolution, Shi'i? Certainly the pursuit of a model in the precedents of the Quran and the Prophet's practice is shared by movements in both Shi'i and Sunni Islam. Iran's debate over the meaning of social justice is Islamic rather than Shi'i; it draws arguments from the example of Muhammad rather than Ali or Husayn. The full portent of the Shi'i doctrine of the Imamate is evident elsewhere, in the Islamic Republic's exaltation of the Shi'i *ulama*. It is true that Khomeini, cast as Imam Khomeini by popular acclaim, makes no claim to a standing equal to that of the Twelve Imams. In its narrowest sense, the title conveys Khomeini's stature as a preeminent leader who combines temporal and

TABLE 1
The Shi'i World in Numbers (a)

	Twelver Shi'i Population	Total Muslim Population	Total Population	Twelver Shi'i % of Total
Iran	37,000,000	39,500,000	40,250,000	92
Pakistan	13,700,000	88,300,000	91,000,000	15
Iraq	8,000,000	13,300,000	14,000,000	57
India	8,000,000	80,000,000	730,000,000	1
Soviet Union	4,000,000	31,000,000	275,000,000	1.5
Afghanistan	2,000,000	16,100,000	16,300,000	12
Turkey	1,600,000	46,600,000	47,000,000	3.5
Syria (Alawis)(b)	1,150,000	8,500,000	9,600,000	12
Lebanon	1,100,000	2,000,000	3,400,000	32
Saudi Arabia	350,000	6,800,000	7,000,000	5
Kuwait	250,000	1,500,000	1,600,000	15
Bahrain	220,000	330,000	370,000	60

NOTE: Worldwide Twelver Shi'i population approximates 80,000,000, or about 10 percent of the worldwide Muslim population.

(a) There are no available census data for the number of Shi'is in any country. The following table represents no more than an estimate, drawing upon a variety of sources.
(b) Not universally recognized as Twelver Shi'is.

spiritual authority. But it is impossible to employ this term in a Shi'i context without evoking the Shi'i doctrine of the infallible Imamate and its theological association with messianic redemption. Khomeini is additionally regarded by ardent followers as *nayeb-e Imam*, the representative of the Hidden Imam, a title which suggests that Khomeini's followers believe his authority to be divinely sanctioned. The immense appeal of Khomeini and the *ulama* is the reflected veneration of the Imams. Without sharing that veneration, one cannot fully subscribe to Khomeini's theory of government.

Similarly, it is impossible for Shi'is living beyond Iran's borders to avoid confronting the issues raised by Iran's Revolution. The vocabulary of political discourse in Iran is understood to the last nuance in this Shi'i world, which stretches eastwards as far as India, southwards into Arabia, and westwards to the coast of Lebanon (see Table 1). Disadvantaged in almost every way, these Shi'is saw in Iran's Revolution an opportunity to press for the redress of their grievances although they differed widely in their choice of means.

In the instance of Iraq, where the Shi'is constitute a bare majority, the Iranian *ulama* exercised a direct influence. Although the spiritual center of Shi'ism was long at Najaf in Iraq, Iranian scholars predominated in the academies, which were supported in the main by donations from Iran. Lectures were customarily delivered in Persian in many mosques

and schools. Although on Iraqi soil, the Shi'i shrine cities were spiritual extensions of Iranian Shi'ism, places where Iraqi Shi'is could sense themselves part of a great community of believers. As Elie Kedourie relates, it was in this cosmopolitan setting that leading Iranian *mujtahid*s first developed their taste for modern politics, turning the shrine cities into centers of agitation against the Qajars. Khomeini followed an oft-trodden path in choosing to spend his years of exile in Najaf, where he formulated his demand for clerical rule and disseminated his message among Iranian followers.

But while the Iraqi shrine cities were safe and effective bases for launching protest and revolution in Iran, they were dangerous places from which to promote similar movements in Iraq. The country's Sunni rulers never accorded to Iraq's Shi'i *ulama* the informal immunities generally recognized by Iran's shahs. This partly explains the passage in this century of many of the leading Iranian *mujtahid*s from Iraq's shrine cities to Qom in Iran, a city of scholarship which gradually came to overshadow Najaf. Even in 1963, at the height of Mohammad Reza Shah's campaign against Iran's *ulama,* they declined an invitation from their coreligionists in Iraq to reestablish themselves in Najaf. The Qom *ulama* acted wisely. By the end of the decade, Iraq's Shi'i *ulama* were themselves subjected to persecution by the ruling Ba'th Party more relentless than anything devised by Iran's shahs.

After Iran's Revolution, a sympathetic movement arose among Iraq's *ulama,* led by Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, a theoretician of Islamic economics and a charismatic figure in his own right. He was so vocal and wholehearted a supporter of the Iranian Revolution that the Ba'th regime concluded that he constituted a dire threat to the state. In 1964, the Shah reached a similar conclusion about Khomeini, and had him banished; in 1980, Iraqi President Saddam Husayn, perhaps having learned from the Shah's experience, ordered the executions of Baqir al-Sadr, his sister, and his closest associates. To eradicate more direct Iranian influence, the Iraqi regime carried out mass deportations of Iranian nationals, many of whom were long resident in the Shi'i shrine cities. And in 1983 and 1985, additional rounds of executions claimed many family members of the Iraqi cleric who led Iraq's Shi'i opposition from Iranian exile. Iraq's once prideful Shi'i *ulama* had overplayed their hand. The Iraqi shrine cities were reduced to ruins as centers of scholarship by a regime which has never felt a pang of conscience in crushing dissent.

The fate of Iraq's Shi'is illustrates that the course of revolution may also lead to suppression, exile, and death. For the Shi'i communities of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain, the peril is still greater. As in Iraq, these Shi'is have no real say in government since power rests in the

hands of Sunni ruling families. And so Iran, sensing an opportunity, has irradiated these small communities with appeals for Islamic revolution couched in an explicitly Shi'i idiom. But Shahram Chubin describes how those who make Iranian policy toward the Gulf have actually wavered between ideology and pragmatism, between threats of subversion and offers of paternalistic protection to the Gulf states. This has made the Gulf's Shi'is wary of Iranian incitements not accompanied by firm guarantees of backing. After all, the demographic position of the Shi'is in the Arab Gulf states is far more precarious than that of Iraq's Shi'i majority. The Shi'is are not so numerous in these countries that they could not be subjected to devastating campaigns of intimidation and expulsion. Shi'i protest in the Gulf, as assessed by Joseph Kostiner, has remained the work of small groups of activists who have not shied from acts of terror against regimes and foreigners in order to hold Shi'i attention. The political mood of the majority has inevitably been borne by the ebb and flow of the war between Iran and Iraq, but they have remained essentially spectators, paralyzed by fear.

It is in Lebanon that the Shi'is have taken up arms in their own cause. The Shi'is of Lebanon, concentrated in the country's rural south and east, saw the transformation of Lebanon into a great commercial center pass them by. The rapid demographic growth of the Shi'i community and the passage of Shi'is in their thousands to the capital of Beirut found no expression in institutions of government, which were dominated by a coalition of Maronites and Sunnis. Joseph Olmert describes the awakening of the Shi'i community to its political potential and the early growth of a Shi'i movement of protest. Not only did this awakening find its leader in a Shi'i man of religion; that leader was of Iranian birth. When Musa al-Sadr came to Tyre in South Lebanon in 1959, he spoke Arabic haltingly, but he was fluent in the political rhetoric of Shi'ism which had won a growing number of adherents in his native city of Qom. Sadr joined the emotive theme of Husayn's martyrdom at Karbala to the widespread social unrest among Lebanon's Shi'is, to launch a movement which won unprecedented recognition for the Shi'i community in Lebanon's confessional system. This he achieved despite the jealous opposition of the great Shi'i landholding families, long recognized outside the community as its only spokesmen.

The civil war for Lebanon, beginning in 1975, forced Sadr to issue a call to arms through the establishment of an armed Shi'i political party, the Amal militia. Augustus Richard Norton demonstrates how Sadr's personal charisma was institutionalized in Amal, so much so that when Sadr mysteriously disappeared in 1978, his movement lost no momentum. By the time of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Amal, under lawyer-politician Nabih Birri, stood virtually uncontested

as the representative of Shi'i aspirations. Iran's Revolution had encouraged Lebanon's Shi'is to conclude that their claims could not be ignored, but the demands of Amal were of the kind which could be met through modification of the existing confessional system, not its destruction. Still, nowhere in the Muslim world did the ideas of the Iranian Revolution find as fertile ground as in Lebanon, among Shi'is who were accustomed to looking toward Iran for religious and political guidance. Some Shi'is began to see their struggle not as an isolated one of a single religious community in one Middle Eastern state. They began to conceive of it as part of a great confrontation between Islam and the West, the former led by Khomeini's Iran, and the latter by the satanic world forces of imperialism and Zionism.

The Israeli invasion of 1982 placed the Shi'is in a position to alter their fate in a profound way. The invasion itself rid South Lebanon and West Beirut of the Palestinian armed presence that had dogged Amal's rise. As Clinton Bailey shows, the opposition of Lebanon's other communities, and especially the Jumayyil regime, to the rise of Shi'i influence merely strengthened Shi'i resolve. The protracted Israeli occupation of the South placed the Shi'i community on the front line of the struggle for Lebanon's integrity and made Shi'i demands for a greater say in government all the more compelling. Amal seemed to be the principal beneficiary of these confrontations, but gains were also made by a number of *ulama* and lay extremists, who mounted a challenge to religious pluralism by advocating the gradual or immediate Islamization of Lebanon.

The factions today engaged in the struggle for the enthusiasms of Lebanon's Shi'is enjoy important external support: Amal from Syria, extremist Hizballah from Iran. Iran's support of like-minded coreligionists in Lebanon needs no explanation. But it has occurred to some commentators that the ties between the Syrian regime and Amal owe something to the fact that Syria is ruled largely by Alawis—among them President Hafiz al-Asad—who in this century have claimed for the first time to be Twelver Shi'i Muslims. Sadr himself forged the alliance between Lebanon's Shi'i community and Syria's Alawi regime by making a gesture of religious recognition towards the Alawis. But as I establish in my study of the several Alawi attempts to gain acceptance as Twelver Shi'is, the leading Twelver *ulama* have yet to extend unequivocal recognition. This constitutes no small problem for Syria's Alawi ruling circles, who are accused by many of Syria's Sunnis of being beyond the pale of Islam and therefore undeserving of rule. Such limited endorsement as the Alawis have received, most notably from Sadr, has been born of political expediency. That Syria is dominated by a kind of Shi'i minority, there can be no doubt; but that minority definitely

does not share the same beliefs, structure of religious authority, and political vocabulary which are common to mainstream Twelver Shi'ism. When religion is made subordinate to politics, miracles again become possible, and Syria's Alawis may yet gain more explicit recognition as Twelver Shi'is. In the meantime, there is no evidence that Syrian ruling circles have fashioned their policy toward Lebanon's Shi'is and the Islamic Republic on the basis of anything but cold calculation.

Another awakening, on Iran's eastern border, has stirred the Shi'is of Afghanistan and Pakistan, who constitute between ten and twenty percent of the population of each country. The predicaments faced by these two Shi'i minorities differ widely. Afghanistan is ruled by a Marxist-Leninist regime bent on imposing a communist social order; Pakistan, by a Sunni fundamentalist regime committed to the imposition of an Islamic social order. But if either regime has its way, Shi'is will be discomfited, and Shi'i movements of opposition have arisen in both countries.

Perhaps no Shi'i community in modern times has experienced Sunni oppression of the sort which Afghan Shi'is have known. As recently as a century ago, large numbers of Shi'is were legally enslaved in the course of jihads waged against them. Since most Afghan Shi'is belong to a distinct ethnic group, with identifiable physical features, their assimilation in this century has been slow and incomplete. Following the Soviet invasion, they were bound to chart their own course of resistance, separate from that of Afghanistan's Sunnis. Zalmay Khalilzad describes the emergence of specifically Shi'i resistance in Afghanistan, against the backdrop of Islamic Iran's policy towards that country and the complex context of Iranian-Afghan affinities. Embroiled in war with Iraq, Iran has not had the resources and will to back up its declaratory policy of opposition to the Soviet invasion, although the Islamic Republic extends limited support to favored Shi'i resistance groups in the hope of gaining a say in any political settlement of the war. Many Shi'i partisans, however, seem to be fighting for their own goals, such as greater participation in government and guarantees of autonomy for Shi'i regions. As in Lebanon, then, the Shi'is are divided between those who have entered Iran's embrace, and those who have kept the Islamic Revolution at arm's length.

In Pakistan, Shi'is organized themselves shortly after the creation of the state in order to defend Shi'i interests against the demands of Sunni *ulama*. Pakistan's Shi'is regarded themselves as heirs to a long tradition of autonomy and even self-rule on the subcontinent, and Shi'is had played a leading role in the struggle for Pakistan. Many Shi'is had arrived in Pakistan as refugees in flight from India, believing that the religious freedom they had enjoyed under British rule could only be

guaranteed in an Islamic state. Munir D. Ahmed traces the growing Shi'i disenchantment with the course set for Pakistan by Sunni *ulama* and their rejection of the Islamization policies pursued by the regime of Zia ul-Haq. This ambitious ruler determined that Islamic law must be implemented, and since there could be only one law of the land, it would have to be based upon the majority rite. For Shi'is, this seemed to offer state sanction to old Sunni demands for religious conformity, which Shi'is had always resisted. Iran's revolution served only to exacerbate Sunni-Shi'i tensions, which of late have led to violent disturbances. The heightened religious sensibilities of Shi'is and Sunnis in Pakistan, far from producing a reconciliation in the cause of Islam, have reminded both sides of all that has separated them since the inception of Islam.

In the small pockets of Shi'ism left behind in India, Shi'is cling tenaciously to their identity, but their presence is a mere trace of a lost era of Islamic expansion and Shi'i power. Keith Hjortshoj explores the meaning of Muharram in Lucknow, the decaying heart of the vanished Shi'i realm of Oudh. That meaning cannot be political in any mundane sense: The Shi'is are but a tiny fraction of India's population, and a political movement would serve no purpose. Yet even here, Shi'is have repeatedly clashed with Sunnis in running street battles during Muharram leading in recent years to official bans on public processions during the holiday. That which Shi'is take for granted almost everywhere can be denied to the Shi'is of India. Yet it is through observance of Muharram, that India's Shi'is preserve their last link to a long tradition and a wider world of Shi'ism. They do not desire revolution, rebellion, or redress of political grievances. Their preoccupation is with survival.

There are Twelver Shi'is in even more dire straits in the Soviet Union and Turkey. So isolated have they been from the main body of Shi'ism for the past fifty years, and so determined are these states to keep them from the influences of Iran's revolution, that it is difficult to say anything authoritative about them at all. These silent Shi'is have not yet found scholars to document their political moods, and they regrettably do not figure in this volume.

Shi'ism, however timeless and universal its moral precepts, cannot rise above history and human geography, above social, political, and economic contexts. In every setting, at every moment, its themes are subjected to continuous reinterpretation by Shi'is themselves, who search its sources for sustenance that is fresh and satisfies the needs of the present. It does not embody an immutable set of political principles, understood by Shi'is at all times and in all circumstances in one sense.

Shi'ism has changed with the world and with its believers, even as they protest their fidelity to tradition.

As this volume demonstrates, place is as important as time. The distance between West Beirut and Old Lucknow, the geographic outposts which today set off Shi'ism to the west and the east, is less a matter of space than of spirit. In one setting, Shi'is are newcomers, displaced but recently from rural life. They have been deeply influenced by radical ideologies of all sorts, convincing some Shi'is that Lebanon might be theirs, provided they are well-organized and well-armed. In the other setting, Shi'is live in their traditional quarters, among decaying monuments to the lost glory of a rich Shi'i urban culture. They know too well that they will never rule again, that they will never again bear arms in a Shi'i cause. Here Shi'is advance, there they retreat, and the mirage of Imam Husayn in the desert of Karbala cannot appear identical from these two opposing vantage points.

Yet it is obvious that there is something aside from belief that many Shi'is do share. Within Iran, most of those who filled the streets in response to Khomeini's appeals were from society's deprived classes; and beyond Iran, Shi'is certainly suffer from the effects of past isolation and, in some places, present-day discrimination. Iran's revolution brought the *ulama* to power, but they claim to exercise their authority on behalf of the deprived masses of Iran, Islam, and the world. These unfortunates are, in the Quranic term, the *mostazafin,* all those who find themselves at a disadvantage. And Shi'is indeed have felt themselves at a disadvantage wherever their numbers are considerable and their influence negligible. It is in the gap created by this discrepancy that Iran's revolution finds Shi'i sympathy.

But the discrepancy need not spell revolution. Where Shi'is constitute an absolute majority but have been reduced in most respects to the social and political position of a minority, the view of Shi'ism as a faith of revolution has more appeal—if only because it would take nothing short of revolution to win Shi'is an influence commensurate with their numbers. This is the situation in Iraq, where Shi'is have indeed fashioned a revolutionary movement, al-Da'wa, which aims at overthrowing the Iraqi regime. But where Shi'is are clearly in the minority, their demands for their due share are not tantamount to calls for revolution, and protest more readily takes the form of a meliorist movement. Such is the state of affairs in Pakistan, where the organized Shi'i movement seeks the existing regime's legal protection of their rights as a minority.

In Lebanon, there is the unparalleled situation in which the Shi'is constitute the largest single minority in a state which has no majority. One of Lebanon's Shi'i movements—Amal—resembles in many respects a minority movement, calling for fair representation within an existing

constitutional framework. Lebanon's other Shi'i movement—Hizballah—is in most respects a revolutionary movement akin to al-Da'wa and rests quite clearly upon the claim that (predominantly Shi'i) Muslims constitute the majority in Lebanon. If the Muslims are indeed to rule, this requires the complete overthrow of the confessional system; Muslims will then protect the minority rights of non-Muslims. In this setting, where Shi'is are in one sense a minority and in another sense a majority, a movement has arisen upon each basic assumption. In all three countries—Iraq, Pakistan, and Lebanon—it is the particular demographic position of Shi'is which closely defines the terms of Shi'i political debate.

The Islamic Republicans of Iran recognized that human geography was paramount when they first read the map of the Muslim world for places where their intervention might bring about a second Islamic revolution. In the first years, extensive support was given to Shi'i revolutionary movements aimed at overthrowing the regimes of Iraq and Bahrain, the only two countries beyond Iran where Shi'is constitute absolute majorities. Both attempts failed, but it would be wrong to suppose that the idea of Islamic revolution enjoyed no popular sympathy among Shi'is in these two countries. It is often noted that Iraq's Shi'is did not rise in response to Khomeini's and al-Da'wa's appeals, and it is sometimes concluded that these Shi'is must have become Iraqi loyalists, especially since they have even battled their Iranian coreligionists to defend the Iraqi regime. But it is apparent that the regime's method has been to inspire at least as much fear as loyalty, and it has been ruthlessly successful in intimidating Iraq's Shi'is. Likewise, the Iranian-backed plot to overthrow the government of Bahrain in 1981 was foiled only through vigilance, and the Shi'i majority of the island is still small enough in absolute numbers that it can be watched and intimidated with no great difficulty. Iraq and the Arab Gulf regimes have resorted to detentions, expulsions, and executions to keep order in their Shi'i communities, and Iran has been forced to look elsewhere for Islam's second revolution.

Lebanon is now Iran's hope. Even observers who have recently discerned signs of moderation in Iran's foreign policy admit that in Lebanon, Iran remains committed to the promotion of revolution through its extensive support of Hizballah. There are, of course, constraints of human geography and political temperament which have led perhaps the majority of Lebanon's Shi'is to support Amal. But the phenomenal rise of the Shi'is to political prominence in Lebanon has stimulated a fantasy in Iran and among some Lebanese Shi'is that Islam's second great revolution in a decade can unfold in Lebanon. The investment of energy, initiative, and resources in this venture has been heavy indeed. For without success, Iran may face isolation even in the world of Shi'i Islam.

It is too early to say whether Shi'is today are on the verge of a lasting split between adherents and opponents of revolutionary Shi'ism as propagated by the Islamic Republic. No development in modern times has had so great a potential for dividing Shi'ism, especially along the modern fault lines of language and nationality. Yet it is undeniable that the message of revolutionary Shi'ism has an appeal capable at times of spanning these same divisions. All depends on the fortunes of clerical rule in Iran, a rule that puts the preeminence of Iranian Shi'ism at great risk. For nearly five hundred years, Iran has stood at the center of Shi'i Islam. But should the Islamic Republicans somehow lead Shi'is elsewhere into disaster, the faith will certainly not be abandoned, but the age of Iranian primacy in Shi'ism may well come to an end.